



FOCUS

Along the Janesville, WI Labor Day parade route, union families covered both sides of the street for a mile and a half.

Grandparents parked lawn chairs under the awnings of local businesses to avoid the threatening storms. Their adult children found curbside seats. And their kids sat on the pavement waiting for the marching bands, antique cars, tractor-pulled floats and hard candy.

The colors went first. A single line of five men, one from each branch of the military, stepped off in unison. They marched in complete silence.

At the American flag's approach, three generations rose as one. Baseball caps came off. Hands covered hearts. Veterans saluted. Kids stood at attention. It was a red, white and blue moment for nearly 20,000 unionized patriots.

But the trade unionists in Janesville were not alone. All across America, millions of working families went to Labor Day weekend picnics and parades. They wore t-shirts with union logos – UAW, SEIU, AFT, IAM,

Like these IAM members in Janesville, families gathered across America to enjoy Labor Day parades, picnics and to celebrate the nation's holiday devoted to working men and women.

AFSCME, TCU, UFCW and dozens more. They swapped family news, listened to speeches, downed a few brews and enjoyed their day off.

And it was their day. Unlike the millions of other Americans who flooded the shopping malls and highways, these mostly blue collar families shared something special: a union contract. And that was cause to celebrate.

But those trade unionists shared something else: a secret. They did not talk about it openly. They did not have to. Their secret was hidden in plain view, hidden behind a sea of union logos.

Their shared secret was pretty brazen: they had the courage to





Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) points out the staggering difference between oil industry CEOs' salaries and average workers' wages. The pay gap between CEOs and American workers has steadily increased over time.

change the country they love. By joining a union, these working men and women altered America for the better, forever.

As members of a union, they raised their nation's standard of living with every dollar earned. With every contract negotiated and every grievance filed, they raised expectations about justice and fairness on the job.

With every dollar contributed and each flyer distributed, they raised the stakes in election after election. And on issue after issue, their letters, emails and calls raised the bar on what was good for the "workin' man" whether he

or she belonged to a union, hated unions with a passion or simply never understood what unions did best.

What is most remarkable about their shared secret?

The courage to change the country they love came from deep within each of them. Just as they rose as one when the flag approached in Janesville, America's union members do not need to be told what to do. They do what they believe is right, and let the chips fall where they may.

That's the inherent strength and power of the American labor movement. Courageous men and women make individual choices to join a union and

then link arms to do battle against long odds.

Facing Long Odds

At each unionized work place, there is a slightly different rhythm to the work week. Shifts change. Breaks come and go. Parking lots fill up and then empty.

Month after month, that rhythm continues. Products move down the line. Customer services and sales mount. Revenues grow; stocks surge.

Sounds idyllic, like waves lapping against a seawall?

It's not.

Away from the work site, executives wrestle for power and perks – a larger share of profits, an opening to new

markets, a longer or larger line of credit, fancy corner offices, multi-million dollar bonuses, platinum pension plans and golden parachutes. And their intense rivalry is magnified right on down the line.

Their minions pant for larger pieces of the pie. Mid-level managers push for more ... more staff, more sales, more products and more customers. Cross pressures to cut costs grow in intensity. And always, more must be done with less.

That's where the idyllic work site ends ... if ever it existed.

Less is defined as fewer employees doing more: higher productivity and mandatory overtime. Less is defined as fewer benefits – no pensions, no health insurance, no paid vacations, no sick days and no loyalty. Less is defined as fewer coffee breaks and shorter equipment breakdowns – human robots working non-stop.

Reality seeps in. The



High gas prices sparked record oil company profits. Unions have fought corporate attempts to cut wages, pensions and health benefits.

AP/ Wide World Photos

workaday world is not a Pollyanna adventure. Petty tyrants roam shop and store floors, break rooms and bathrooms. Even with limited discretion – the power to impose their will on the unwilling – supervisors can be mean, menacing and just plain miserable excuses for human beings.

Granting special favors ...

applying rules unevenly ... assigning easy tasks to ass kissers ... giving the dirty jobs to trouble makers ... scheduling work with impunity ... promoting on whim – the pettiness of petty tyrants pours salt into the wounds caused by their incessant demands to do more with less.

Now it's just a job, just another paycheck. But it was always that and not much more.

Working Under Union Contracts

And yet, the inherent unfairness and injustice rankled those who valued their freedom, took pride in their

Former Exxon Mobil CEO Lee Raymond and other oil industry executives answer questions at a Senate hearing about exorbitant oil industry profits. Raymond retired in 2006 with nearly \$400 million in retirement benefits.



AP/ Wide World Photos



IAM members get the final say on contract offers, such as these members of District 751 in Seattle, WA voting on a proposal by the Boeing Company.

skills, and earned the respect of their peers.

A generation or so ago, a few workers said, “Enough! This just ain’t worth it. Either pay me more to put up with this s*** or take this job and shove it.”

In that split second, two, three, maybe half a dozen

“workin’ men” started something others now benefit from each day. Their union is our inheritance.

For the men and women manning those production lines and customer service counters today, there’s only one thing that stands between them and the newly

minted petty tyrants that roam those floors. It’s a union contract.

Spelled out in that union contract are pay scales, seniority rules, health and welfare benefits, work rules and grievance procedures. That union contract has grown in size and complexity over the years. But one thing hasn’t changed: the pay-me-more-to-put-up-with-your-s*** attitude.

At each set of negotiations, company representatives and negotiating committees hammer out new language. The law says they must bargain over “wages, hours and conditions of employment.” And they do.



Union negotiating committees backed by rank and file members are keys to winning good contracts. In 2005, Boeing workers hold their traditional “March for a Contract” with the Main Table negotiators; Aerospace Coordinator Dick Schneider; District 751 President Mark Blondin; District 70 President Steve Rooney; District 24 DBR Bob Petroff and the Negotiating Subcommittees.

But contract negotiations are also about freedom, pride and respect. The freedom to associate with other workers and belong to a union; the pride of being paid more for higher skills; and the respect due from managers and fellow workers – all those intangibles can also be found in a union contract.

Sometimes it takes a strike to win the right kind of contract. Sometimes it takes long, grueling and late hours of banging away at the company to prevail. But, at least in the Machinists Union, it always takes a vote of the membership to ratify the end product.

Passed down from generation to generation is a working family heirloom – a union contract.

Invest in the Future

Is it worth it?

IAM members pay dues equal to about two hours wages per month. The weighted hourly average across the union is \$21.17. So, on average, the IAM dues are now about \$500 per year.

Some members pay more; some pay a little less. But their dues are based on how much they actually earn.

But five hundred bucks a year is nothing to sneeze at. It's the cost of a new refrigerator nowadays.

Over the three years of a standard IAM contract, a member will pay roughly \$1,500 in dues. They will earn over \$120,000 in wages plus all the benefits – paid



Wages, pensions, health care, fair treatment and job security are top issues in almost all contract negotiations. IAM members at District 751 in Seattle, WA show their support during rallies leading up to the 2005 contract negotiations.

vacations, health insurance, pension contributions, etc. – that are negotiated into their contract.

That's about \$40,000 more than a non-union worker gets for doing exactly the same job for three years. So it pays – pays big time – to belong to a union.

And yet, the value of a union contract doesn't stop there. That contract gives

workers a way to keep raising their own standard of living. It's a simple thing called the expiration date.

Every three or four years, depending on the exact wording of the contract, the company has to sit down with the union to negotiate a new contract. And that's where the value of having a union, a union with experienced and professional negotiators, really



Local 639 member German Rodriguez and fellow members at Bombardier's LearJet facility in Wichita, KS won a better contract in October, 2006 after 22 days on the picket line.

comes into play.

Think of that \$1,500 in dues for three years as an investment in the future. What's the return on that investment?

Well, at the Boeing Company in 2005, 18,000 IAM members won an eight percent ratification bonus, two \$3,000 lump sum payments, a 17 percent increase in pensions and stopped the company's attempt to pass along several thousand dollars in medical costs. Just the bonus and lump sum payments produced a Return-on-Investment (ROI) of 733 percent!

At Spirit AeroSystems, 4,000 IAM members received \$61,000 apiece under the collective bargaining agreement when the company went public last December. ROI for that check and stock shares is 4,066 percent – that's right, over 4,000 percent!!!

At United Airlines, 18,000 IAM members negotiated \$1.4 billion in equity distributions when the company emerged from bankruptcy; established a defined benefit pension that would provide benefits of \$51.06 per month by 2009; and secured better than industry average wages. Just the equity distribution

meant an ROI of over 5,000 percent, 5,286 to be exact.

At Fort Rucker, Alabama, IAM members won immediate pay raises of more than 40 percent in their first contracts! Since these new members paid no dues, the ROI was priceless.

At Bombardier's LearJet facility in Wichita, Kansas, 1,100 IAM members negotiated a \$1,500 signing bonus and an 11 percent pay hike during the three year contract. There the ROI exceeds 400 percent.

What investment broker on Wall Street would produce those three year cumulative ROIs – or returns on investments? Not a single one.

But the IAM does every year. With over 3,400 separate contracts, the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers is making more money for its members every day the old fashioned way: earning those raises, bonuses and benefits at the bargaining table.

Best Contracts Possible

Employers start with two advantages. First, their strategy is clearly designed to squeeze every last cent of profit from contract negotiations. Every

dollar earned by an employee is a dollar subtracted from the bottom line. They plead corporate poverty, insufficient productivity, Wal-Mart style pricing pressures, global warming, inflated costs – just about anything in order to hoard dollars for management bonuses and stock dividends.

Second, their corporate treasuries provide unlimited resources to fund aggressive anti-union campaigns. Their tactics – divide and conquer ... spies, stooges and scabs ... implied threats and actual dismissals ... selective hires and union busters...injunctions and lockouts – are as old as the books they often cook. And their inherent financial advantage sets up a David versus Goliath contest.



Airlines used bankruptcy court to terminate company pensions for thousands of employees, but the IAM successfully negotiated the IAM Pension Plan for its members at Aloha, United, Northwest and US Airways.

To win against long odds, unions need member solidarity, real-time information and shrewd, savvy negotiators.

Solidarity isn't just a phrase. It entails an organized, year-in-year-out effort to support each other throughout

contract negotiations.

Solidarity takes a permanent organization – district and local lodges – that offers members a chance to engage in a range of activities: community service, political action, negotiations, human rights, women's rights and communications.

Real-time information comes from sophisticated research and high-tech communications. The IAM's Strategic Resources and Information Systems Departments combine to provide the latest economic analysis and company profit/loss statements with databases filled with contract language and past practices. Negotiating committees can call on a range of communication tools from internet press releases to videos posted on YouTube.

But the investment of dues dollars in the negotiators themselves is what pays real dividends. From the



Mike Lacy, left, a weather forecaster with 3D Research/Schafer at Ft. Rucker, Alabama won a 40% wage increase under the Service Contract Act in their first contract, negotiated with the help of Business Rep. Tony Blevins, right, and District 75 staff who administer more than 70 contracts covering Alabama, Northwest Florida and Southeast Georgia.



More than 46,000 IAM members have attended courses at the IAM's William W. Winpisinger Education and Technology Center in Hollywood, MD. The Center offers state-of-the-art training in collective bargaining and offers more than 80 courses in all areas of union activism.

negotiating classes conducted at the Winpisinger Center for old hands to the on-the-job training that new negotiating committee members receive, from the expertise developed by the District Business Reps and General Chairs to the hard-nose tactics deployed by the Aerospace Coordinators, those brothers and sisters are professional negotiators who produce industry-leading contracts year after year.

The Bottom Line

The member solidarity infrastructure – Grand Lodge, Winpisinger Center, Territorial Offices, District Lodges, Local Lodges, negotiating committees – does not come cheap. The IAM spends more than 100 million dollars each year maintaining that internal capacity.

It's worth it. Each year,

IAM dues paying members earn well over \$17 BILLION in wages. And with each expiration date, that number only grows.

AFL-CIO Impact on Negotiating Contracts

What does the AFL-CIO do during IAM negotiations?

Not one damn thing.

No phone calls, no press releases, no meetings, no borrowed expertise, no money, no researchers, no lawyers, not one damn thing. And, for over five decades, that has been the established practice – absolutely no involvement in an established collective bargaining relationship.

On its best days, the AFL-CIO influences the climate in which every negotiation takes place. A more worker-friendly political climate – from city hall to the halls of Congress – can move negotiations along.

A more worker-friendly media climate – from the local radio stations to the nightly network news – can counter a corporation's economic advantages. A more worker-friendly judicial climate can rebalance the scales of justice and make injunctions harder to get.

But the AFL-CIO's best days are few and far between. Its best is but a mirage. However, when the AFL-CIO does focus on its original purposes – ending internecine rivalries, voicing labor's aspirations and exercising its political might – its impact on negotiations can be positive.

George Meany declared that the AFL-CIO's "sole, definite and single purpose [is] the advancement of the welfare and interest of the great mass of workers." Today, that purpose is fulfilled by effective advocacy and aggressive political action. Period.

Focus on the Indispensables

Unfortunately, too many labor bureaucrats have forgotten where our strength and power comes from – that great mass of workers. They discount the value of an engaged and active membership. Instead, they believe that the world revolves around them.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

As the men and women who lined the Janesville Labor Day Parade route demonstrated, *they* are the indispensables.

As the brothers and sisters who walked the picket lines at Boeing, Goodyear, Raytheon or other companies proved, *they* are the indispensables.

Their strength comes from a shared commitment to each other. A spirit of solidarity empowers them to accomplish what others shy away from even attempting.

Jim Leslie, the former director of the William W. Winpisinger Education and Technology Center, demonstrated to his leadership classes that a single stick snaps with the slightest pressure. But a bundle of sticks cannot be broken by any man.

It is the combined strength of millions of members that has altered the North American landscape.

Still, the lie persists. Journalists, politicians and tycoons see one man and mistake him (or her) for the American labor movement.

The egotists among us believe that, since they are the sharpest knives in the toolbox, they have only to say “follow me. I have the answers to what ails the American labor movement.”

The ancients believe that, since they were present at the creation, they need only say, “Follow me. I am the American labor movement.”

The young radicals believe that, since they spark off ideas like a pinwheel, theirs is the only route to follow.

That great mass of workers knows better.

The Street Level View

The three generations of working families lining the Janesville Labor Day Parade route shared one more secret.

Besides having the courage to change the country they love, they also shared an open

secret: it pays to belong to *their* union.

Their union logos – UAW, SEIU, AFT, IAM, AFSCME, TCU, UFCW, IBT, IAFF and dozens more – were worn with pride in Janesville ... Lorain, OH ... Detroit and every community that celebrated Labor Day 2006. Their unions had delivered on the promise of a better life, not a perfect life, but a better one.

The pride came from having fought for their union contract and, in doing so, won a better standard of living for their families and the next generation's, too.

The American Labor Movement, as seen from the street level, was strong, vibrant and patriotic. It had energy, camaraderie and intensity.

All it asked for were leaders who mirrored their own spirit of solidarity.



The IAM's William W. Winpisinger Education and Technology Center holds numerous classes related to bargaining, such as this “Strategic Bargaining” class. Winpisinger Center Director Chris Wagoner, left, plays the role of company negotiator with members of Local 933's Negotiating Committee, from right, Liz Hunter, Scott Capullo, Thomas Hacker, Asst. DBR Steve Taylor, Louie Martinez, John Catalano, Aaron Kalamas, and Directing Business Rep. Bobby Martinez.